

Medicine Cabinet Alert!

Telephone Directory

Customer Service

(941) 748-4501
ext 6415 and ext 6417
(941) 741-2960

Employee Health Benefits
(941) 748-4501 ext 6403

Member Advocacy
(941) 748-4501 ext 6407,
ext 6409, and ext 6411

Lifestyle Assistance and
Modification Program (LAMP)
(941)741-2995

Diabetes/Nutrition Program
(941) 748-4501 ext 6410

Communications Coordinator
(941)748-4501 ext 3964

Fitness/Exercise Programs
(941)748-4501 ext 3979

Pharmacy Advocate
(941) 748-4501 ext 6406

Prescription Solutions
(800) 797-9791

Precertification
(941) 741-2963

Allergy Season is Marching In



Allergies are triggered by a variety of allergens such as pollen, animal dander, dust mites, and mold. When you're exposed to the allergen, your immune system releases a number of chemicals, such as histamine, that cause allergy symptoms. Symptoms can vary from person to person and may include sudden sneezing, congestion, an itchy, runny nose, and itchy, watery or swollen eyes. About 10% of people in the U.S. suffer from allergies.

How to Choose an Allergy Medication

Most people suffering from allergies can find relief by using over-the-counter (OTC) medications called antihistamines. Zyrtec (cetirizine) and Claritin (loratadine) are both OTC allergy medications. Benadryl (diphenhydramine) is also an option, but it can cause sleepiness – don't take it before driving or doing other important tasks.

Prescription medications are also available for allergy treatment. For example, Allegra (fexofenadine) is a prescription medication approved to treat allergy symptoms. This medication is available in a generic version. You may have heard of Xyzal, another prescription allergy medication. This medication is also approved for the relief of allergy symptoms, but it does not have a generic version available. It is also closely related to the OTC medication Zyrtec, but Xyzal costs a lot more!

Another prescription medication, called Singulair, is sometimes used to treat allergies. Singulair was originally approved by the FDA for long-term management of asthma and for exercise-induced asthma. Singulair can be used to treat allergies, but with the variety of other lower cost allergy medications available, you might ask yourself – "Why pay more?"

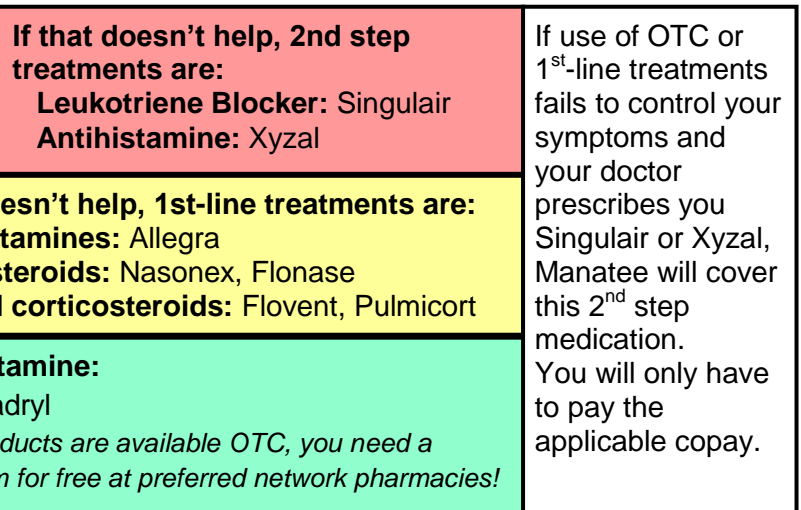
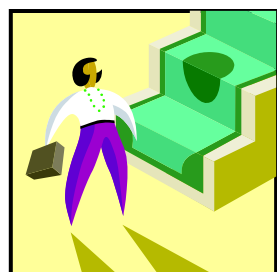
What is Step Therapy?

"Step therapy" is a way that Manatee helps reduce the cost of medications by helping members start with a "first-line" medication that is safe and effective, as well as cost-effective. Under a step-therapy program, certain drugs are not covered unless the patient has tried one or more "first-line" medications first. If the "first-line" treatment has not been successful, members can obtain a "second step" medication.

How Does Step Therapy Work for Singulair?

Manatee's step therapy for Singulair requires members to have tried one of the OTC or first-line treatments, listed in the steps below, in the past 120 days.

You wouldn't walk to the top of the steps if you could get what you need on the ground floor, would you? Use the lowest step that works for you!



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Cost Comparison of Allergy Medications

OTC allergy medications cost far less than prescription allergy medications. Generic versions of these OTC medications are also available, which can help you save even more money. The chart below compares the costs of these medications:

	MHN Preferred Pharmacy (Costs per Month)	Non-Preferred Pharmacy (Costs per Month)
Start with an OTC: Cost of Zyrtec or Claritin	\$0 No cost to member	\$5
Step 1 Generic: Cost of Generic Allegra tablets	\$0 No cost to member	\$5
Step 2 Brand: Cost of Brand Singulair*	20% of the drug cost (Approximately \$23)	25% of the drug cost (Approximately \$29)
Step 2 Non-Preferred Brand: Cost of Brand Xyzal	40% of the drug cost (Approximately \$35)	50% of the drug cost (Approximately \$43)
If you use Singulair instead of generic Allegra, it will cost you an extra...	\$276 per year	\$348 per year
If you use Xyzal instead of generic Allegra, it will cost you an extra...	\$420 per year	\$516 per year
If you use Singulair instead of OTC Zyrtec or Claritin, it will cost you an extra...	\$276 per year	\$348 per year
If you use Xyzal instead of OTC Zyrtec or Claritin, it will cost you an extra...	\$420 per year	\$516 per year

*MHN restrictions: only covered for patients 12 years and older; Step Therapy required

Other Allergy Fighting Tools

Try these tips to help prevent and fight allergy symptoms:

- Use saline nasal spray helps to clear congestion and moisten nasal passages
- Run air conditioner to help keep out allergens like pollens
- HEPA filters can filter allergens out of the air in the home
- Place cheesecloth (available at hardware stores) over air conditioning vents to help catch dust particles
- Shower or bathe before bedtime to wash allergens off your hair and skin
- Keep windows and doors shut whenever possible to keep allergens from coming in
- Reduce the amount of mold in your home by removing houseplants and by frequently cleaning shower curtains, bathroom windows, damp walls, areas with dry rot and indoor trash cans. Use a mix of water and chlorine bleach to kill mold.
- Reduce dust mites in your home by removing curtains/drapes, feather pillows, upholstered furniture, non-washable comforters and soft toys.
- Wash all bedding in hot water (hotter than 130°F) every 7 to 10 days.
- Lower the humidity in your home using a dehumidifier.

For more information about allergy symptoms and treatment, visit www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/allergy.html.

Manatee Health Disclaimer

The information in this newsletter is not a substitute for medical advice. It is for reference only and should not be used to determine treatment for your specific medical conditions-only a health care provider can do this. You should seek prompt medical care for any specific health issues and consult your physician regarding the use of over-the-counter products to treat any medical condition or consult your physician regarding the use of prescription or over-the-counter products to treat any medical condition or before starting any new diet, fitness, or supplement regimen.

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